

KING CAESAR HOUSE

THE WALLPAPERS OF THE KING CAESAR HOUSE

by

Frances K. Fogg
September 1967

Everyone who has been inside the King Caesar House has always been very much impressed by its two beautiful old scenic wallpapers, the one in the West parlor and the three panels in the upstairs hall. When the Historical Society bought the house, we called in Mr. William J. Young, head of the Research Laboratory of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, to tell us what should be done to preserve them. First, he sprayed them with a vinal acetate for protection and then suggested to us that he could move the wallpaper in the upstairs hall back to its original location in the East parlor. By measuring the three panels we found that they would fit the three walls almost perfectly. With the help of interested people in Duxbury, I was able to raise the money for this project, and Mr. Young and his staff moved the paper.

We were very fortunate to be able to get Mr. Young to help us at this time because as soon as he had finished moving the paper, he was called to Florence to help restore their art treasures which had been damaged in the terrible flood.

Other members of the Museum of Fine Arts staff who worked on the paper were Miss Florence Whitmore, Mr. Young's technical assistant; Joseph W. Harrington and Merville E. Nichols. As they were full-time staff members, they did the restoration work on week-ends only. They removed the paper by spraying it with a special solution which penetrated and softened the back. Within a minute or two at just the right moment the paper was removed. It took two days to remove the three panels. The paper was then placed on the floor, looking much like a jigsaw puzzle with pieces missing. In the East parlor, at the original location of the paper, a fine grade of cotton canvas was mounted on the wall. Then the wallpaper was pasted on the canvas so it could be easily removed if necessary. The paste was put on the canvas, not on the paper which was very delicate. Where pieces of the original wallpaper were missing, paper of the same thickness was cut and pasted in the blank spots and retouched.

In retouching Miss Whitmore used plastic-based paints because they are more permanent in color and more durable. To complete the restoration the paper was sprayed with vinal acetate for preservation. Miss Whitmore did a great deal of work on the paper during the winter of 1966, and she is now working on the South wall, where she will reproduce some of the missing scenes in their proper order to complete the room.

This wallpaper was thought to have been designed by Zuber but in the library of the Museum of Fine Arts I found a book by Henri Clouzot which gave a very complete illustrated description of the paper. It was printed in 1826 by Amable LeRoy, who was the son-in-law and successor to Joseph Dufour, one of

the most famous wallpaper designers of France. It is called "The Incas" and was inspired by Marmontel's book "Les Incas ou la Destruction de L'Empire du Perou". It tells the story of Pizzaro's conquest of Peru in 1531.

The wallpaper was made in sheets 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 17 inches high. These sheets were put together to form strips running from dado to ceiling. The complete set was composed of thirty strips. The wallpaper was hand blocked by cutting a series of blocks for every part of the design, which had first been drawn on paper and painted in water colors or tempera. The colors were superimposed on each other by blocks. After all the colors had been printed, it was still necessary to touch up the whole design with a brush. It was not uncommon to cut 300 to 700 separate blocks for one series, and it is known that Dufour LeRoy used 1500 to 5000 blocks on some papers.

There is part of the complete series of the "Incas" paper in the Eliza Ward House in Providence. We drove Mr. Young and Miss Whitmore down to see this and photograph it before they started the restoration work in the King Caesar House. There is also some of the Incas paper in "The Lindens", the headquarters of General Gage, which was moved from Danvers to Washington, D.C. The wallpaper firm of Nancy McClelland in New York also owns 27 feet of this paper for which they are asking \$7,500.

When the Museum staff removed the "Incas" wallpaper from the upstairs hall, they discovered another paper under it. They separated the two papers and saved as large a section of the underpaper as possible. It is a striped paper showing columns of corn stalks and green leaves on a yellow background with an interesting border of molding and leaves. Mr. Young and Mr. Abbot Cummings of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities think that this paper was put on the walls of the East parlor when the house was built in 1808 as it is a paper of that period. Later after 1826, the "Incas" paper was put on over it. Still later when the "Incas" paper became shabby and was removed by the Westons, Mr. Young thinks that both papers were moved together, as it would have been almost impossible to separate them. The paper was put on the walls of a small bedroom and later Dr. Herman Bumpus moved it to the upstairs hall.

Another old wallpaper was found in the King Caesar House on an old fire-board, which fits the fireplace in the West bedroom. It shows a shepherdess with a lamb and, according to Mr. Cummings, belongs to the early 19th century. Musee des Arts Decoratif think it was made by Joseph Dufour.

The wallpaper in the West parlor we have not been able to document. It is a beautiful old scenic paper printed in blocks of the same size as the "Incas" paper. According to Mrs. Lucia Knapp Royal, whose father bought the house in 1886, this wallpaper was given to Jerusha Bradford by her brother Captain Gamaliel Bradford at the time of her marriage to Ezra Weston, Jr. in 1793. The clothes worn by the people in this paper, however, would make us think it was of a later date than 1793. The men are wearing long tan trousers and tall hats which were not worn until after 1300 at the earliest. Another reason for thinking that the paper is later is that Jerusha and Ezra Weston, Jr. lived with his father for fifteen years after their marriage until they built the King Caesar House in 1808.

So far we have not been able to discover the age or maker of this wallpaper.